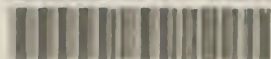


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LAFAYETTE IN BROOKLYN

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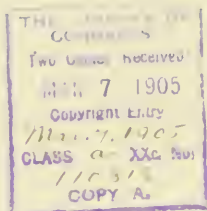
LAFAYETTE IN BROOKLYN

BY
WALT WHITMAN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
JOHN BURROUGHS

GEORGE D. SMITH
NEW YORK
1905

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From a photograph by Cox

Lafayette

From the painting by

S. F. B. Morse

Facsimile of a part of

Whitman's Manuscript

The following paper is printed literally from an undated MS. prepared by Whitman for the printer, but never published. The minutes of the New England Historic Genealogical Society mention two occasions — October 5, and December 7, 1881 — on which papers on Lafayette were read and followed by "remarks by several gentlemen." Whitman's name is not recorded in the minutes of either meeting.

INTRODUCTION
BY
JOHN BURROUGHS

INTRODUCTION

I HAVE often heard Whitman speak of the incident of his childhood narrated in the following pages, and always with a feeling of pride and pleasure. It probably occurred in the fall of 1824 as Lafayette landed in this country in August of that year. He came in response to an invitation from Congress, made through President Monroe, and remained with us over a

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year, visiting all the principal cities and each of the twenty-four states.

At this time the Whitman family had recently moved to Brooklyn from the country, and I fancy that Walt was a typical country boy of about five years, not at all "bright and smart" as city boys so often are, but ruddy, normal, healthy — a bit of sound rural humanity, yet very impressionable, as his vivid recollection of the Lafayette incident, even to the color of the horses and of the barouche in which he came, clearly shows. In that casual incident of a moment, the French democracy of the eighteenth century, as exemplified by the life and character of one of its most noted representatives, embraced and caressed the heir

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of the new democracy of the nineteenth century — its future poet and most complete and composite embodiment. There is something very significant, almost fateful, in the incident. In all that crowd of children Lafayette could have touched none other who was destined so to glorify and embody in imaginative words the spirit of the country to whose service he had, in his young manhood, so freely offered his life.

How much his memory of Lafayette influenced Whitman's liking for the French people, it would be impossible to determine. Certain it is that he always had a peculiarly warm feeling for that nation, more so I think than for any other European country. There was some

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thing in that audacious revolutionary spirit of the French that moved him; — that struggle for liberty, —

Alone, among the sisters, thou, Giantess, didst
rend the ones that shamed thee.

He wrote two poems to France, the first on the French Revolution, published in 1860, in which he says —

Pale, silent, stern, what could I say to that
long-accrued retribution?
Could I wish humanity different?
Could I wish the people made of wood and
stone?
Or that there be no justice in destiny or time?

The last poem in 1870 was suggested by the defeat of France by the Germans. During this war I remember that Whitman's sympathies were as pronounced in favor of the French, as are our sympathies to-day, in favor of Japan as against Russia. The

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poem is entitled "O Star of France."

Dim, smitten star
Oph' not of France alone, pale symbol of my
 soul, its dearest hopes,
The struggle and the daring, rage divine for
 liberty,
Of aspirations toward the far ideal — enthusiast's
 dream of brotherhood,
Of terror to the tyrant and the priest.

Truly there was something prophetic in this caress of the child Whitman by Lafayette.

JOHN BURROUGHS.

LAFAYETTE IN BROOKLYN
BY
WALT WHITMAN

I remember quite well
~~L'Esperance's looks at the same~~
~~but~~ tall, brown, ^{not fair}
handsome in the face, but ^{of good figure}
the pattern of good-nature, health,
manliness, and ~~very~~ ^{human} attraction.
A D. (A large ^{to oo} full
length oil-painting exhibited
for ~~over~~ ^{five} years ago in
Philadelphia ^{in 1877, I think} seems to me
an admirable likeness as I
recollect him at the time.)

I ^{over} ~~was~~ ^{eight} ~~years
of the beautiful sunshiny day,
the occasion ~~at~~ ^{the occasion} ~~of~~ ^{of} Pontaneau's
effusion of humanity, ^{all stayed at and the occasion,} made
something a picture, ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~which~~
~~that~~ ^{which} time has so continued
to set deeper and deeper in
my recollection.~~

The following impramptu reminiscence of Lafayette's visit to this country in 1825, and his going over one day to Brooklyn, New York, was given some time since at a meeting of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, in Somerset street, Boston.

Walt Whitman.

LAFAYETTE IN BROOKLYN

IT was in 1824, (or '25, I am not certain which, I was a little "kid" of five or six years old.) I remember it was an exceptionally pleasant and sunny forenoon. At that time the reception of a public man, or other festival of the kind, was very different from anything of the sort now—was quite informal and old-fashioned, without the crowds, and blare and ceremony

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of the present day; but was full as hearty & far less tedious. The people on this occasion all turned out and formed on both sides of a hollow lane nearly two miles long, thickly fringed with well-dress'd humanity, women as well as men, the children placed in front. That was about all, yet it was singularly effective. Lafayette came over at Fulton Ferry, (then called the Old Ferry) in a large canary-colored open barouche, drawn by four magnificent white horses. I think there was no band of music, and I think no speechifying, (or if so, only a few brief words) — but a marked profusion of young children, and old men, (several of the latter were revolutionary soldiers,) and a number of blacks freed from slavery by the then late New



WALT WHITMAN

York emancipation acts. These diversified the main assemblage which was composed of substantial Brooklyn citizens with their wives.

Through all, the carriage of the noble Frenchman was very slowly driven. I remember that the fine horses and their impatient action under the curb, attracted my attention fully as much as the great visitor himself. The whole thing was curiously magnetic and quiet. Lafayette was evidently deeply pleased and affected. Smiles and tears contended on his homely yet most winning features.

But the principal incident in my recollection is now to come. They were at that time just commencing the foundation of the Brooklyn Apprentices Library,

LAFAYETTE IN BROOKLYN

and Lafayette had consented to lay the cornerstone with his own hands—that is to grasp it personally. Some half a mile or over from the ferry, he stopt, got out of the barouche, and in the midst of the crowd, with other gentlemen, assisted in lifting the children, amid the deep-cut excavation and heaps of stones, to safe spots where they could see the ceremony. Happening to stand near, I remember I was taken up by Lafayette in his arms and held a moment—I remember that he press'd my cheek with a kiss as he set me down—the childish wonder and nonchalance during the whole affair at the time,—contrasting with the indescribable preciousness of the reminiscence since.

I remember quite well La-

WALT WHITMAN

fayette's looks, tall, brown, not handsome in the face, but of fine figure and the pattern of good-nature, health, manliness, and human attraction. (A life size full length oil-painting exhibited years ago in Philadelphia, in 1877 I think, seems to me an admirable likeness as I recollect him at the time.)

That beautiful sunshiny day, over sixty years since, the spontaneous effusion of all stages of humanity, and the occasion, made a picture, which time has continued to set deeper and deeper in my recollection.

NOTES

Whitman was born May 31, 1819. Lafayette laid the corner-stone of the Apprentices' Library on July 4, 1825.

The Apprentices' Library Building was situated at Cranberry and Henry Streets. The building was pulled down some years ago, and the association is now incorporated in the Brooklyn Institute.

The portrait of Lafayette referred to by Whitman is the one painted by S. F. B. Morse, which now hangs in the Governor's room of the City Hall, New York.

"Almost in this same neighborhood [Broadway and Canal Streets, New York] I distinctly remembered seeing Lafayette on his visit to America in 1825."—Whitman's "Address on Lincoln."

"Lafayette was at that time between sixty-five and seventy years of age, with a manly figure and a kind face."—Whitman's "Goodbye, My Fancy."

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